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ABSTRACT

The Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges has repeatedly identified the strengthening of communications as a key component to developing the California Community Colleges (CCC) as a system. The genesis of communications planning, activities and priorities took place in 1989 with the Burson-Marsteller Communications Action Plan, developed by this national firm in conjunction with the Communications and Public Affairs Division of the CCC. The Action Plan, generated through a statewide survey and evaluation of the public image of the CCC, lays out the priorities for strengthening the communications activities of the CCC with regard to public understanding of the system. Each year, the CCC Foundation has funded at least one priority activity from the Plan. Key activities from the Plan which have been completed include: a "how to" manual for public affairs that has been distributed statewide to chief executive officers and trustees; the State Chancellor's Hour monthly public affairs show; the quarterly Impact newsletter; a system presentation brochure; a system video; and a recognition program for teaching excellence. Three major new initiatives are being considered for the future: the development of a statewide community college newspaper; increased national media exposure in conjunction with the CCC's Commission on Innovation; and crisis communications training workshops for teams of college chief executive officers, trustees, and public information officers. The Burson-Marsteller communications review, the Action Plan, and a division workplan aligned to the available funding for projects are attached. (JMC)

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ED 337 223

Board of Governors
California Community Colleges
November 14-15, 1991

SYSTEMWIDE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN AND PRIORITIES

5

A Report

Ann Reed

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SYSTEMWIDE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN AND PRIORITIES

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A Report

Background

In the Board of Governors annual *Basic Agenda*, strengthening communications has been repeatedly identified as a key component of developing the California Community Colleges as a system.

Since the inception of the Communications and Public Affairs Division in 1988, there has been an annual report to the Board of Governors outlining divisional goals and objectives, as well as key activities in progress. At the August meeting, following the debut of the system video, the Board of Governors requested a November review of communications planning and activities.

Analysis

The genesis of the division's activities and priorities is the Burson-Marsteller Communications Action Plan that was developed in conjunction with the Public Affairs staff in 1989 (Appendix A). That report was presented to the Board in January 1990. The action plan lays out priorities for strengthening the communications activities of the California Community Colleges with regard to public understanding of the system. The plan was developed following a statewide survey and evaluation of the accuracy and effectiveness of the public image of the California Community Colleges.

Following advice and input from the Community Colleges, the priorities of the Chancellor's Office Communications and Public Affairs Division carefully delineated the functions for a system communications effort that strengthens and builds on the efforts of the local colleges and organizations.

Each year, the California Community Colleges Foundation, which hired the national firm of Burson-Marsteller and financed the research project, has funded at least one priority activity from the plan. Additionally, the Foundation has taken on the responsibility of underwriting ongoing communications projects and activities

identified by the Chancellor's Office and the Board of Governors and linked to the action plan. The California Community Colleges Foundation Board of Directors met in October to review proposed communications initiatives and approved a \$75,000 communications support budget for the coming year. The workplan for the division will be revised to reflect the fiscal situation.

While significant progress can be demonstrated in the development of a system-level communications program, the fact that only one professional staff person in the Chancellor's Office is responsible for handling communications activities hinders the extent of activities necessary to implement a strong communications plan. Efforts to strengthen the public affairs activities through budget change proposals have been futile and staffing remains a key issue.

*Staff Presentation: Ann Reed, Vice Chancellor
Communications and Public Affairs*

Systemwide Communications Plan and Priorities

The Communications and Public Affairs Division of the Chancellor's Office is charged with developing a formal program of communications to increase general understanding of the role of the California Community Colleges. This includes developing specialized communications techniques to provide adequate, accurate, and timely information to a variety of publics who have expressed an interest in, or have a need to understand, the activities of the California Community Colleges.

The system's communications efforts have been undertaken as directed in the Board of Governors *Basic Agenda* and through the implementation of AB 1725, which prompts that accurate and adequate knowledge and understanding of the system must be communicated to a variety of interested parties. To respond to this charge, the communications program includes targeted publications, media contacts and briefing materials, as well as public affairs events, hosting visiting dignitaries, training college information personnel, and responding to inquiries from the general public, field, and media. A division workplan, aligned to the available funding for projects, has been provided to the Chancellor annually (Appendix A).

Goals and Objectives

The genesis of the division's priorities is the Burson-Marsteller Communications Action Plan that was developed in conjunction with the Public Affairs staff in 1989 (Appendix B). Based on a survey conducted by this national firm, the strengths and weaknesses of the California Community Colleges communications activities were identified. Activities were then prioritized into an action plan to strengthen communications, primarily with groups outside of the system (Appendix C).

Each year, the California Community Colleges Foundation, which hired Burson-Marsteller and financed the research project, has funded at least one priority activity from the plan. Additionally, the Foundation has taken on the responsibility of underwriting ongoing communications activities such as providing photographers, services of an occasional free-lance writer, press kits and presentation folders, the Board's resolutions and awards, and other informational and public affairs related activities,

In addition to the long-range study, several other steps have been taken to implement an adequate systemwide information program including a communications assessment and an annual workplan.

Key activities from the Burson-Marsteller Plan that have been completed are:

- The "how to" manual for public affairs that has been distributed statewide to groups of chief executive officers, trustees, and public information officers;
- The State Chancellor's Hour monthly public affairs show;
- The quarterly *Impact* newsletter for business, community leaders, and elected officials;
- The completion of a system presentation brochure;
- The system video;
- The Chancellor's community visit program which includes editorial board visits; and
- The development of a recognition program for the Board such as the Pacific Telesis/Hayward Award for Teaching Excellence and the California Lottery/Exemplary Program Awards.

Additionally, the Communications and Public Affairs Division spends a significant proportion of time dealing with college, state, and national media. A single major issue can easily result in nearly 200 stories in the state press. National press interest in the California Community Colleges has increased over the past year and will continue to do so in the coming year. In addition to more than one-half dozen editorial board and newsroom press visits per year, each month the Vice Chancellor for Communications and Public Affairs handles an average of 45 to 50 press inquiries; issues an average of two press releases; is involved with setting up and responding to one formal Community College press conference; and assists staff in responding to more than 100 inquiry calls per day.

New Initiatives

Three major new initiatives are being considered for the future: development of a statewide Community College newspaper; increased national media exposure in conjunction with the Commission on Innovation; and crisis communications training workshops for teams of college chief executive officers, trustees, and public information officers. Staff time in developing such projects will be a major commitment.

In addition to new initiatives, emphasis will continue to be placed on media contacts. Each published or broadcast story has tremendous potential impact reaching thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of residents with information about the

California Community Colleges. With inadequate funds and professionally trained staff to implement a full-range public awareness and communications plan, the division has concentrated on conveying the California Community Colleges story through maximizing access to free public media – television, radio, and newspapers. Although media interest in the California Community Colleges is continuing to build, the severe agency staffing limitations have cut back the agency's ability to be proactive rather than reactive with regard to press contacts. Lack of staff to produce and prepare releases, tip sheets, press kits, initiate warm-up contacts, and do timed follow-up visits and calls has resulted in less progress than was demonstrated during the period that an additional staff member was employed.

Annual projects, such as video and brochure production, substantially decrease time available for media activities. With only one professional staff member, the agency cannot compete for news space as successfully as many of the sophisticated and well-staffed public affairs units of the other two segments of public higher education, private universities, and some individual community colleges.

Limitations

The California Community Colleges make up the largest system of higher education in the world. It might therefore be anticipated that the system would have the resources to provide a statewide communications and public information program at least comparable to the system headquarters of the other two state-supported systems of higher education, each with smaller student populations. However, no such staffing or funding is in place, nor is it likely in the immediate future.

For the past three years the budget request for the Communications and Public Affairs Division has not been funded by the State. This has occurred despite the fact that in the Burson-Marsteller survey of colleges, 89 percent of those within the Community Colleges who responded indicated a need to increase the system's impact at the statewide level; 96 percent stated it is important to build widespread support for the system as well as individual community colleges; and only 16 percent felt a good job of communicating information about the system had occurred previously.

Without state funds, professional personnel, equipment, and project funds do not exist except as provided by the Foundation. Working in conjunction with the Board of Governors, the Board of the California Community Colleges Foundation has identified the public relations and communications program of the Chancellor's Office as one of its key funding priorities. Last year, the Foundation devoted approximately \$74,000 to ongoing communications activities including printing of media fact cards, the State Chancellor's Hour, the quarterly newsletter *Impact*, and additional funds of \$50,000 were committed for the development of the system video.

The effectiveness of the Communications and Public Affairs Division is essentially dependent upon the resources of the California Community Colleges Foundation.

While special projects can be funded by the Foundation, media inquiries cannot be handled outside the agency. Currently, the agency's ability to meet the media's demand for information has been exceeded. As the significance of education in the news continues to build in the coming year, the demand promises to further outstrip the agency's ability to effectively handle media inquiries. Part of the situation has arisen as a result of the agency's budget cutback which for the division resulted in the loss of the interjurisdictional exchange (IJE) public information officer, a printer, the general information receptionist, and the agency's writer/editor. The Communications and Public Affairs Division is composed only of the Vice Chancellor, a secretary, four documents and publications clerks, a research librarian, and a four-member reprographics and mailroom unit. There is currently no trained specialist staff to support the activities outlined in the communications plan.

Therefore, the annual goals and objectives to be implemented in the coming year will reflect the ability of a single staff member to conduct the needed daily media and public information activities, as well as direct major projects.

The Chancellor's Office, in conjunction with the Board's Committee to the Foundation, will continue to work with the Foundation to seek funds not only for highly visible communications pieces, but also for support of the necessary public awareness and communications activities. The Chancellor's Office also will continue to seek a level of funding for communications activities parallel to other state agencies, Boards, and Commissions and the other segments of public higher education.

APPENDIX A

Chancellor's Office California Community Colleges Communications and Public Affairs

Goals and Objectives 1991-92

This is the third annual planning document for the Communications and Public Affairs Division of the California Community Colleges. It is an attempt to direct – thus maximize – the unit's resources toward specific goals, through a series of specific objectives.

The responsibilities of the Communications and Public Affairs Division includes news and media services, field and internal communications services, publications, library and information resource services, reprographics, desktop publishing, and the mailroom. Other activities involving the Communications and Public Affairs Division are public presentations or events officially representing the Chancellor's Office, serving as the Chancellor's liaison in specific public arenas, hosting and touring visiting dignitaries, and as staff support to the Foundation. The guidelines for all Public Affairs activities throughout the agency are included in the publication, "What Color is the Dog You Bit?"

Due to severe agency budget cutbacks, services of the Communications and Public Affairs Division, as well as this year's goals, have been trimmed to reflect the current funding situation. In light of the current agency staff limitations, the effectiveness of the Division has become substantially more dependent on the resources of the California Community Colleges Foundation.

Goal: Continue the development and implementation of a full-service news, communications, publications, and public events support unit for the California Community Colleges.

Objectives

1. Set up budget change proposal (BCP) and the Department of Personnel Administration (DPA) provisions for funding and staffing the division on a long-term basis.
2. Find resources to bring in areas of expertise and provide minimum level of staff support.

3. Secure appropriate equipment to print and mail the necessary materials required by the agency to keep all audiences well informed and current.
4. Secure short-term project funding.

Goal: Increase the national visibility and reputation for the California Community Colleges.

Objectives

1. Communicate with the other prominent influentials by increasing the opportunities to share the California Community College message with national audiences.
2. Increase national exposure through increased press and media relations. (See press relations.)
3. Continue and expand the Chancellor's and Board's role in national activities through appropriate and high visibility activities.
4. Improve press release capabilities and distribution of the clip packet to national interested audiences.

Goal: Improve internal communications.

Objectives

1. Secure staff to allow re-establishment of the in-house newsletter.
2. Present in-house workshops on improving public presentations and media relations.
3. Further develop the agency's newsletter and publishing capacities both for internal publications and field communications.
4. Establish the office's system for planning, coordinating, improving, and critiquing Chancellor's Office communications products.
5. Develop agency style guide for agenda preparation, reports, and studies.
6. Secure appropriate funds and develop new publications as necessary to meet current information needs.

Goal: Improve communications with the field and other target audiences.

Objectives

1. Update and revise all internal mail lists creating accurate subdivisions with annual procedures for updating.
2. Provide additional student assistance to do mail label input and updating.
3. Expand the clip service and distribution as requested.
4. Develop a statewide media training session for all levels of spokespersons through the chief executive officers or other organizations.
5. Establish a publications advisory team to assist in the development of systemwide media projects.
6. Further develop and utilize the embryonic, statewide computerized information network.
7. Secure long-term funds to begin at least one major statewide Chancellor's Office publication for the field such as a Chancellor's Update, News Digest, or Program Alert publication.
8. Develop the Chancellor's Hour monthly television show into a documentary style format.
9. Strengthen the Chancellor's Office/College information system through appropriate briefings and regional meetings.

Goal: Improve press and media relations.

Objectives

1. Meet with and/or expand all contacts with national education reporters.
2. Develop a separate nationwide specialty publications list for increasing national press.
3. Make at least one one-week newsroom tour to meet in person with business desk and education reporters of the top 15 papers statewide.
4. Meet with student press leaders on at least one key issue.
5. Secure adequate staff to re-institute college and weekly press responses.

6. Secure adequate assistance to produce needed press packets and briefing materials in a regular and appropriate manner.

Goal: Increase the impact of the Chancellor's Office and the California Community Colleges with business leaders, as well as elected officials at national, state, and local levels.

Objectives

1. Strengthen the direct communications link with business, industry, and elected officials by bolstering the writing, the frequency, and the distribution of a publication such as Impact.
2. Establish business communications links through a Chancellor's Council and provide re-enforcing information.
3. Increase speaking engagements to target audiences by the Chancellor, Board of Governors members, and senior staff.
4. Work with the California Community Colleges Foundation to expand business contacts and private sector support for the system.

Goal: Improve public impact for the Board of Governors.

Objectives

1. Establish publication products to adequately portray the stature and responsibilities of the Board of Governors.
2. Develop further public exposure for meetings.
3. Directly assist the Board of Governors in promotional activities and events such as awards programs.

Goal: Improve general public communications.

Objectives

1. Update current fact cards and add fact cards for diversity and economic development.

2. Develop systemwide "viewbooks" on general information and vocational/economic development work.
3. Develop a modular slide/tape show or video on the system to accompany pre-packaged speeches for target audiences.

Goal: Improve use of the library/resource center.

Objectives

1. Write and distribute a master plan on the library's intended functions and operations.
2. Organize and publicize the library resources and research capabilities.
3. Provide computerized services for use by agency staff.
4. Improve documents and information distribution services from the library.

APPENDIX B

Community Colleges Communications Review

*Summary Report by Burson-Marsteller
Completed July 1989*

Introduction

In June 1988, representatives from The Community College Foundation first contacted Burson-Marsteller regarding the development of a public relations or communications program for the colleges.

The need for better communications within and without the system was well recognized. In the 1988-89 *Basic Agenda*, the Board of Governors included better communications among its immediate priorities. The agenda notes: "Beginning now, we must enhance the 'image' of community colleges through improved communications, public information, consultation and the strengthening of the Chancellor's Office with the colleges and appropriate organizations." The Foundation Board, working with the Chancellor's Office, assumed the challenge of improving perceptions of the colleges.

Following a series of preliminary meetings with a special committee of the Foundation Board and the Chancellor's Office, Burson-Marsteller provided several suggestions on the development of a communications plan. In March, the committee approved a two-phase plan: an evaluation or review of the current communications environment and the development of an actionable communications program.

This report summarized the findings from the first phase of the program development process, the Communications Review.

Objectives

The primary purpose of the Communications Review is to gather and analyze information that will aid in communications planning. Specific questions to be explored in the review include:

- How is the Community Colleges system perceived by our most important external constituencies? Have we adequately communicated our goals and our objectives to these groups?

- What are the primary sources of information about the Community Colleges? What media should we target in our plan?
- What should our communications priorities be? How can communications help support our organizational goals?
- How do we organize the communications function? What resources are required to fulfill our communications objectives? What is the appropriate role of the Chancellor's Office? The Foundation? Individual colleges?

Audiences and Methods

The plan for the review included several methods: survey research, focus group discussion, personal interviews and secondary research (analysis of existing information). The method for each group was largely determined by information needs and available resources.

Several groups participated in the review process. Criteria used in their selection included the extent of their influence or involvement in implementing community college communications (for internal groups) or the importance of their support in achieving organizational goals (for external groups).

It is important to note that the focus of the review is on external communications. Internal groups and individuals responsible for establishing communications policies or planning communications efforts will have opportunities to comment on and participate in the review through reports, interim presentations and planning sessions.

Summarized below is an outline of the review plan by participating group:

- *Local Districts and Colleges:* Questionnaire distributed to the 133 regional chancellors and local presidents following April 21 Consultation Process meeting. Also, questionnaire distributed to 300+ public information officers at conference on April 26. Follow-up interviews at conference.
- *General Public:* Review of existing studies, media coverage and other information on public attitudes toward community colleges.
- *Government Representatives:* Telephone interviews with three representatives of key elected and appointed officials.
- *Corporate Employers:* Telephone interviews with senior management or human resources representatives from six of the top private employers in the state.
- *Corporate Foundations:* Telephone interviews with representatives from six corporate foundations.

- *Related Organizations:* Telephone interviews with representatives from seven related associations.
- *Media:* Telephone interviews with nine reporters or editors responsible for covering the California Community Colleges.

Limitations

The findings summarized in this report provide valuable insight into the perceptions of the Community Colleges among its various audiences and into the colleges' communications efforts. They should not, however, be considered definitive.

Because of the methods used and the small sample sizes, comments are not projectable. In addition, the review or audit process is a highly subjective and interactive one, requiring the interpretation and judgment of many individuals. Results are best viewed as suggestive or directional.

About the Report

The body of California Community Colleges' Communications Review Report summarized the results of the internal survey and our discussions with key groups and provides a glimpse of each audience's view of the Community Colleges. Verbatim comments were selected as representative of discussions with that group or for the insight they offered on the topic.

Based on these findings, the results of our chief executive officers/public information officers research and Burson-Marsteller's experience in organizational communications, we outline for internal discussion our recommendations for the California Community Colleges' external communications program in preparation for program development.

Executive Summary

Perceptions of the Community Colleges

- Internally, representatives of local colleges:
 - Feel their individual schools are well regarded, especially among alumni, local community and local government, but comparatively not as well regarded among the news media, prospective students and local secondary schools.
 - Believe perceptions of the California Community Colleges system are not as favorable as their individual colleges, particularly among state government, news media and foundations.
 - Believe California has one of the best community college systems in the country, but that this fact has been poorly communicated.
- In terms of external audiences:
 - Corporate employers generally support the colleges' mission and goals, but prefer four-year college graduates and more "formal" education.
 - Corporate foundations believe fund-raising efforts should be spearheaded locally and would be more inclined to support individual schools (as opposed to the "system").
 - Government representatives acknowledge the need for funds, and indicate that closer ties with private industry and alumni might facilitate this effort.
 - The news media is generally favorable toward the efforts of the Chancellor's Office, but has concerns about high turnover and limited communications experience at the local level.

Key Issues

- Image of the community colleges as "second-rate" or less valuable education.
- Funding needs at the system level, in addition to the local college level.
- Experience (or lack thereof) of communications people at the local level.
- Limited regular communication with alumni (particularly important since most colleges believe they are well regarded among alumni).
- Local college autonomy as both a strength and weakness.

Current Efforts

- Local colleges produce a wide variety and large number of publications, press releases and other materials, and most have active media relations programs.
- At the state level, communications is limited to one person whose primary role is coordination/production of materials and media relations for the Chancellor's Office.
- There is little crossover/coordination between the two.

Communications Priorities

- Consensus that "we need to do more" to increase visibility on both the State and local levels, and that major public relations activities should be coordinated at the state level.
- The most important external audiences for local colleges are prospective students, local secondary schools and the local community; at the state level, this would most likely be state government, corporate employers and news media.

General Recommendations

- Develop a clear, consistent set of messages tailored to audiences.
- Create a strong, impactful identity for the California Community Colleges.
- Enhance the capability of the Chancellor's Office to disseminate information and initiate activities.
- Promote increased coordination of activities between the Chancellor's Office and local colleges.
- Effectively merchandise public relations results to key audiences.
- In 1990, begin initial planning for 25th anniversary of the California Community Colleges system.

APPENDIX C

Summary of California Community Colleges Communications Action Plan Recommendations

*Summary Report by Burson-Marsteller
Completed July 1989*

Introduction/Program Overview

When Burson-Marsteller was retained by The Community College Foundation in March 1989, the assignment was to conceive, supervise and implement a two-step communications process. Phase One was the communications review, the findings of which are included in the previous section. Phase Two, development of a communications action plan, is contained in the following pages.

The recommendations that follow are based on the findings of the communications review, and are to serve as a blueprint for future communications activities implemented by the Chancellor's Office and/or Foundation, utilizing the services of outside counsel as appropriate. The majority of activities outlined in this document were discussed and debated in a "brainstorming" session held at Burson-Marsteller's offices, which included representatives from the Foundation and Chancellor's Office.

The action plan is structured as follows:

- *Communications Objectives* What we want to accomplish
- *Communications Strategies* How we plan to accomplish it
- *Audiences* Primary groups to be reached during Year One
- *Messages* General tone of what we want communicated to these groups
- *Program Elements* Description of recommended activities (some new, others existing*); activities identified as "A," "B" or "C" priorities, with "A" being the most important
- *Estimated Budget* Cost estimates for all recommended activities (based on Burson-Marsteller implementation), which delineation of those we suggest be taken on by the agency

* It is acknowledged that some of the activities listed herein are currently being effectively implemented through the Chancellor's Office. Generally speaking, we recommend that these activities continue, but perhaps be enhanced or broadened by incorporating additional elements. This has been noted in the descriptions of each activity.

Communications Objectives

- Generate awareness of the California Community Colleges as:
 - ▶ a unified, statewide entity speaking with one voice on major issues.
 - ▶ a group of individual, uniquely diverse schools serving a variety of communities and constituencies.
- Increase understanding among key audiences of the positive impact California Community Colleges have on California and its 27 million residents.

Communications Strategies

- Establish the Chancellor's Office as the primary source of information on the system, its activities and position on issues via an ongoing flow of communication.
- Create materials and communication vehicles that are "system-oriented" but which can be appropriately tailored, and made available to individual colleges on an "as-requested" basis; communicate the availability of materials to individual schools.
 - ▶ equip local public information officers with the knowledge and skills to utilize these materials for maximum benefit and otherwise conduct effective local communications programs.
- Implement a "rifle-shot" approach with key audiences through public relations tools communicating pertinent, audience-specific messages.
- Support "Project Change" program targeted at corporate foundations.
- Keep messages consistent with the stated mission of the Community Colleges.

Key External Audiences

In order of priority:

- Corporate Employers/Private Industry
- Corporate Foundations
- Government Representatives

The news media is not listed as an audience, since the press is primarily a conduit for disseminating messages to the groups listed above. Each audience will have its own

specific "media relations" activities listed in the "Program Elements" section of the action plan.

Key Messages

It is important to understand that the following messages are not meant to serve as catchy slogans or advertising phrases, and are not even meant to be themes, per se. Rather, these represent the general tone and feel of what we would want said to these audiences . . . what we want them to know about the Community Colleges.

Corporate Employers/Private Industry

- The California Community Colleges – through quality career education, employee training, transfer education programs – prepare hundreds of thousands of individuals a year to be productive members of the workforce, meeting the needs of an ever-expanding California, and thereby making a significant impact on the state's economy.
- To further the mission of providing career education, the California Community Colleges need the active support of private industry.
- The California Community Colleges work in partnership with private industry.

Corporate Foundations

- Everyday, the California Community Colleges touch the lives of millions of Californians – through community service, adult education, day-to-day instruction, jobs, etc.
- Public funding must be combined with private sector support to continue effectively preparing Californians for careers, and providing educational opportunities for those who might otherwise be precluded from pursuing higher education.

Government Representatives

- Along with the University of California and California State University, the California Community Colleges system is representative of the state's commitment to higher education. The system's constituents – students, faculty, donors, administration, community leaders, employers – encompass millions of Californians from Eureka to San Diego . . . more than UC and CSU combined. Together, they present a strong coalition of support for the system and its individual colleges.
- The system requires continued public sector support and attention on the legislative agenda to effectively meet the needs of this extensive, diverse constituency.

- The California Community Colleges system is working actively to speak with a unified voice on issues of importance to its stakeholders and legislative bodies.

News Media

- As one of the three public systems of higher education in California – and the single largest educational system in the world – the California Community Colleges, through the Chancellor's Office, are in a unique position to speak with authority and insight on education, economic, and social issues impacting California.
- All above audience-specific messages.